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Course: PMA 1135

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## Spring 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

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Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

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The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw-Hall by Tuesday, May 2 at Noon. No exceptions can be made.

## Spring 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name Kriszta Pozsonyi

Department PMA Course # and title 1135 FWS: Screen Queens of Comedy

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Film Viewing Reflection Worksheet

Title of Writing Exercises

May 23, 2017

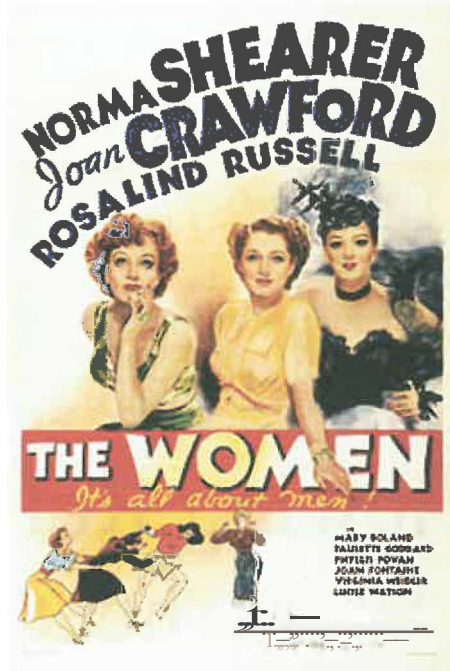
# Film Viewing Reflection Worksheet

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Application for the Spring 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

**Kriszta Pozsonyi**  
**Instructor of PMA 1135 "FWS: Screen Queens of Comedy"**  
**[Pick the date]**

*The Women* (George Cukor, 1939) - Reflection



Before viewing:

You are about to watch a 1939, mainstream Hollywood movie, *The Women*. Above, you can see the film's poster. Take a closer look at the poster, think about what you know or imagine about the era the mm was made, and write down some of your expectations regarding what you are about to see. For example, what kind(s) of womanhood do you think the film will present to its viewers? How important will female characters really be? What kinds of roles or characters (including race, class, sexuality, but also age, ability, profession, etc.) and what kinds of relationships do you expect to see? What feminist topics/issues do you think the film might raise and what feminist topics/issues will it not touch upon? (Note that it doesn't matter if you "get it right" and predict perfectly what the movie will or will not do.)

**During Viewing:**

Take a screenshot of at least 3 moments of the film that *visually* stand out to you and paste them here. Write down a few keywords or a few sentences about what makes these moments and images special or significant.

**After Viewing:**

**Look back at your answers to the first question - which of your assumptions proved to be right? Was the viewing surprising in any way? If so, how?**

**What makes the film pleasurable to watch? Did you find it enjoyable at all? Why?**

**What could be (some of) the merits of the way the film represents/approaches women?**

**In what sense can the film be considered feminist?**

**What are shortcomings or failures of the way the film represents/approaches women or feminism?**

**How does comedy work in the film? What does the film suggest about women's relation to and place in comedy?**

**How does *The Women* compare to *I'm No Angel*? Do you see any similarities between the two films? Are there important differences?**

## Film Viewing Reflection Worksheet: Explanation and Principles

### Explanation:

This worksheet, while it was used in my class to guide students through an engaged viewing of the film *The Women* (George Cukor, 1939) at home, could be easily adapted to other film or television viewings. Aiding students' viewing with a worksheet like this not only facilitates a more engaged and attentive viewing experience but also allows them to craft written responses that take more time than what we could efficiently allocate within a class session. This worksheet provides a chance for students, especially those who are *reflective learners*, to take more time and engage more deeply with complex questions of the course.

I use worksheets like this as low-stakes writing exercises. I do not grade them. I set their deadline as one or two days before the class session where I want to discuss the film, and I *use them extensively* in facilitating class discussion. In my class, students put a lot of work into them. As I do not grade them, I express my appreciation for their effort by making them integral to our work together. (If you can, you might want to make sure that you have something [a screenshot or an idea] from each of the students in the class and name them when you bring it into the discussion.)

The worksheet also provides me with a way to call on students who otherwise speak less in class and to do so in an encouraging way, by asking the student to share a response they gave to a question because I found the response especially thoughtful or interesting.

### The principles behind the worksheet and tips on adapting it

I structured this worksheet to consist of three main parts:

1) The first part asks students to make predictions about what they are about to see. On the one hand, these questions will give students a focus for viewing. For instance, in this worksheet, I wanted students to pay attention to the kinds of female characters, relationships, and women's issues that the film showcases. On the other hand, pre-viewing questions like these can make students more aware of their own assumptions. To further encourage this kind of reflection, I start the third (final) section below with a question that asks students to review what they wrote here.

#### Tips for use/adaptation:

- Have students fill out this first section at the end of the class when you give it to them, before they are expected to view the film (to ensure they do answer these questions beforehand and without looking up the film first)
- Instead of the movie poster, you could use an image from the film (or television episode) itself or other promotional materials related to it. E.g., if you were to teach about *Game of Thrones*, you could share an image of the throne itself and ask students what they think the design communicates.

2) The second section is to be filled out during viewing, and it only asks students to take screenshots of visually outstanding frames. With this question, my goal is to get students to not only look at the film for its "message" but to pay attention to its aesthetic and formal features. It is also a way to vary the kind of work and thinking we are asking students to do.

Tips for use/adaptation:

- You might want to check if students know how to take screenshots (all of my students were aware)
- If you have previously covered or want to focus on specific aspects of film aesthetics, you can make this section even more specific; e.g., "take screenshots of frames where you see extreme close-ups and briefly reflect on why you think the director decided to do so"; or, "take screenshots of moments when music is being used in a disturbing way in the film and reflect on how sound works with the visuals you chose"

3) The final section poses questions that relate the viewing back to the first section and to our on-going class discussions.

Tips for use/adaptation:

- Tailor this section to the on-going conversations and questions in the course
- You can ask students (as I did in the last question) to compare the film/television show to other viewings in the class or ask them to connect what they saw to viewings or experiences beyond the classroom

Further/logistical tips:

- Let students know in advance how long the film's runtime is and how long you anticipate filling out the worksheet will take so that they can budget in ample time



*The Women* (George Cukor, 1939) - Reflection



Before viewing:

You are about to watch a 1939, mainstream Hollywood movie, *The Women*. Above, you can see the film's poster. Take a closer look at the poster, think about what you know or imagine about the era the film was made, and write down some of your expectations regarding what you are about to see. For example, what kind(s) of womanhood do you think the film will present to its viewers? How important will female characters really be? What kinds of roles or characters (including race, class, sexuality, but also age, ability, profession, etc.) and what kinds of relationships do you expect to see? What feminist topics/issues do you think the film might raise and what feminist topics/issues will it not touch upon? (Note that it doesn't matter if you "get it right" and predict perfectly what the movie will or will not do.)

I predict that this film will feature and focus on primarily Caucasian, wealthy women who are motivationally driven by men (based on the "It's all about men!"). It may follow a motif of women fighting with other women for the same man, which therefore puts the power in the man's hands. The females may be ditzy and focused on glamour and wealth, but may also be of the sly and scheming type. I hope that the film touches on the fact that women's lives do NOT revolve around men, maybe with a final conclusion that the women are better than the men they chase. That would be a nice twist on the tagline. However, I think that the film will still not touch upon women as the dominant figures of the house/relationship, and will proliferate a patriarchal lens.

### During Viewing:

Take a screenshot of at least 3 moments of the film that *visually* stand out to you and paste them here. Write down a few keywords or a few sentences about what makes these moments and images special or significant.



- The use of color to make the clothing look more lavish and beautiful.
- The exaggeration of the glamour and wealth of the attendees of the fashion show through color, sets, props, clothing, accessories.



- One of the funniest/silliest scenes because it's basically a spoof on the ridiculous things that wealthy women have access to/attempt, especially to maintain (or attain) beauty and youth.
- Physical comedy, like weird squats and crumpling to the mat.



- Actual catfight breaks out between two women.
- Hair-pulling turns to shoving and more aggressive actions, then even to smashing plates and yelling "I hate everything."
- Very out-of-character for the women, especially the proper Mrs. Fowler.

### After Viewing:

Look back at your answers to the first question - which of your assumptions proved to be right? Was the viewing surprising in any way?

Mostly all of my predictions came true in some sense. The film did focus women of the upper class who had access to many ridiculous amenities, yet it also did present the problem of cheating, disloyal husbands. Some of the women were ditzy, like Peggy, others were scheming, like Crystal, and yet others were both, like Sylvia. However, I was not expecting the lead female to start off headstrong and prideful and then succumb to the pressures of "being a good wife." I was hoping that it would be the opposite, where she suffered with a cheating husband and then learned that self-sufficiency was better.

What makes the film pleasurable to watch? Do you find it enjoyable at all? Why?

The film was pleasurable because you like and respect the main character, Mary, and feel that she will end up happy eventually. Even the semi-villainous Sylvia is so ignorant and privileged that it is easy to simultaneously hate and like her, feel sorry for her, and laugh at her. The overall criticism of the lives of the upper class was also enjoyable because while the chaos of socialite life was exaggerated, it still stayed true to life. I really enjoyed watching this film because it was interesting to focus SOLELY on women and their "everyday" lives as wives, mothers, friends, and socialites.

What could be (some of) the merits of the way the film represents/approaches women?

I really respected the fact that the film not ONCE showed a man. The entire film was comprised of only women, and the absence of men was almost inconspicuous. While the lives of the women did seem to be focused on speaking about men and being affected by the actions of men, not once did we see an interaction between a man and a woman. Therefore, it felt more that the men were just the "objects" of desire for the women and the true plot and entertainment came from the way the women handled the problems that arose. Also, the film successfully juxtaposes many different types of "stereotypical" women - such as a greedy seductress, a pretentious socialite, and a ditzy innocent friend - with the most standard woman, Mary. Mary is unremarkable in the fact that she is a good mother, a loyal and loving wife, a caring friend, and a smart and independent woman. She is respected to a great degree during the film especially due to the other "types" of women she is surrounded by.

In what sense(s) can the film be considered feminist?

The film can be seen as feminist because of its approach to telling the story. It never allows a man to control the plot, and features only women helping each other make decisions and control their lives. Further, it even degrades the typically highly-respected "man of the house" by focusing on a common fault of unfaithfulness. All of the women's

husbands are led astray by scheming seductresses, and as Mary's mother explains, it is because they get bored and are basically too stupid to learn to entertain themselves with other things, such as how wives turn to housework or socializing.

What are shortcomings or failures of the way the film represents/approaches women or feminism?

I was not a fan of the ending of this story, in which Mary admits that she had too much pride in herself when she left her husband for cheating on her and blatantly ignoring her for many weeks. She runs back to him after discovering that he was unhappy with his new wife - the mistress - and seems as though she is regretful of the actions she took, rather than believing that he was most definitely the one in the wrong. Also, this film portrays a conviction that women backstab each other and are all gossips who thrive of hearing the intimate details of each other's lives. There are a few supportive friends, such as Ms. Aarons, but many of them seem two-faced and catty.

Lastly, as I predicted, this film focused entirely on the patriarchal structure of households, in which men have the power and control over the house and the women are there to take care of the children, pets, and physical household. The women wait for their husbands to come home, then go to the theater or dinner. However, I did appreciate this "glimpse" into the lives of wives when their husbands aren't around.

How does comedy work in the film? What does the film suggest about women's relation to and place in comedy?

There are displays of physical comedy, such as during two of my screenshotted scenes, in which Sylvia is exercising or having a catfight. The humor stems from the mockery of the lavish and self-centered lives of wealthy wives who have nothing to do but socialize, be pampered, shop, and talk about their husbands. However, each character is uniquely funny in their interactions. For example, Peggy is the "stupid" friend who often doesn't understand what's going on, Sylvia is the ridiculously self-centered friend who would do anything to benefit herself, but also often makes a fool of herself, and Flora is the follower of Sylvia who often just looks silly in her strange outfits or bouts of exaggerated woe. This entire film was funny, but not focused on humor, showing that women can do both and effectively create a balanced story. While it was lighthearted and I often chuckled, the women were not cracking jokes or making me burst out laughing. The subtlety of the comedy displayed that women can just be funny casually, and don't have to take themselves too seriously.

How does *The Women* compare to *I'm No Angel*? Do you see any similarities between the two films? Are there important differences?

It was interesting how in *I'm No Angel*, Mae West portrays a woman more similar to Crystal, the antagonist in *The Women*. They both use men for money and comfort,

without really caring about the other women they hurt along the way. However, West's Tira was similar in strength and confidence to Shearer's Mary because they both saw themselves as women who definitely deserved the men they interacted with and never seemed to see themselves as subordinate and lesser than their love interests.

Student Response: Sample 2  
*The Women* (George Cukor, 1939) - Reflection



Before viewing:

You are about to watch a 1939, mainstream Hollywood movie, *The Women*. Above, you can see the film's poster. Take a closer look at the poster, think about what you know or imagine about the era the film was made, and write down some of your expectations regarding what you are about to see. For example, what kind(s) of womanhood do you think the film will present to its viewers? How important will female characters really be? What kinds of roles or characters (including race, class, sexuality, but also age, ability, profession, etc.) and what kinds of relationships do you expect to see? What feminist topics/issues do you think the film might raise and what feminist topics/issues will it not touch upon? (Note that it doesn't matter if you "get it right" and predict perfectly what the movie will or will not do.)

I think that this film will demonstrate women in a more powerful tone, much like *I'm No Angel*. Especially as its subtitle is "It's all about men!," I feel that the film will definitely show independent and strong (not damsel-in-distress) protagonist females. Also, considering the poster shows three female main characters, I would assume the film would pass the Bechdel test and at least show women conversing about something other than the men in their lives. Although, a part of me also doubts this because the title is so obviously feminine, it might be so because the topic of women vs. men will be dominant in the film. I think that these women will work in the entertainment industry as it seems most early popular films with women follow this trend (from Mae West to Marilyn Monroe). As such, I think this film will depict women of higher class and more material

needs, again basing off my slim knowledge of the roles played by the two previously mentioned actresses.

**During Viewing:**

Take a screenshot of at least 3 moments of the film that *visually* stand out to you and paste them here. Write down a few keywords or a few sentences about what makes these moments and images special or significant.



This image shows the wealth of the culture to which Mrs. Haines and her friends pertain. They attend this party with grand instruments, expensive clothing and jewelry and exuberant decoration. This fashion show could only be accomplished by a society of great wealth.





This image I found interesting because in contrast to the typical black-and-white style of the film as well as the full color fashion show, this shot simultaneously shows black and white and color.



I loved this shot because it showed the beautiful relationship between Mary and her daughter. It showed how much each cared for the other and the way the daughter is sat on the bed, a level higher than Mary shows how much Mary cares for her and how important she is to her.

#### **After Viewing:**

**Look back at your answers to the first question - which of your assumptions proved to be right? Was the viewing surprising in any way?**

This film definitely depicts women of high class, as I had predicted. Nevertheless, although the film is about women, I highly doubt it would pass the Bechdel test as all the conversations, whether it be between Mary and her friends, her daughter, or her mother, were about men. Ultimately, this is what I find surprising: there are no male characters in the film, yet I feel as if the whole film revolved around them. The women presented were



catty, powerless or disloyal and none to be revered. Even though Mary was presented as a relatable figure, I still found her charactering lacking characteristics to be prized as a model by viewers.

**What makes the film pleasurable to watch? Do you find it enjoyable at all? Why?**

I definitely found the film enjoyable! I really like the humor and fast-paced nature of the film. Although I did soon find many of the characters rather annoying, I did enjoy watching Mary and especially her relationship with her daughter play out and ultimately fix her marriage.

**What could be (some of) the merits of the way the film represents/approaches women?**

The film shows women as powerless creatures of gossip, riding on each other's broken marriages as potential suitors or entertainment. Although, for the time, I believe the film and the actresses tied to it were trying to make a groundbreaking statement: a film led solely by women, it relies too much on the men in their lives. Albeit a product of its time, the women of high society did not have to have any jobs, so it's understandable how much of their livelihood relied on their marriages. Nevertheless, it showed rather nice depiction of mother-daughter relationships, when it comes to Mary and her mother and daughter, even if it shows very bad female friend relationships.

**In what sense(s) can the film be considered feminist?**

This film can be considered feminist as it is probably first (and if not to this day, only) movie to have an all-female cast. Also, this film shows how much control a woman can have over her life if she chooses to do so. If one was to compare Mary and Crystal, although Mary seems like the most relatable and "better" of the pair, Crystal was the only strong and closest to independent female character of them all.

**What are shortcomings or failures of the way the film represents/approaches women or feminism?**

This film depicts women in an awful way. It shows cattiness beyond any other characteristic, especially in the gossip that carries much of the plot. Also, it shows women always revolving around men, never succeeding by themselves and always thinking about what they are lacking without a man, with a man, etc.

**How does comedy work in the film? What does the film suggest about women's relation to and place in comedy?**

The cattiness depicted in the film only worked for the sake of comedy. The nature of the gossip was rather comedic and because much of it seemed so silly, it is what made the Mary such a relatable character. Also, some of the physical humor proved to be funny, most of the time regarding the character of Sylvia Fowler. I think this movie shows that women are a great portrayer of comedy in a manner very different to that of men. The fast-paced and light nature of their comedy is both different and equal to that of men in the industry and shows that if women are able to pull off the success of this film, then they can carry themselves well.

**How does *The Women* compare to *I'm No Angel*? Do you see any similarities between the two films? Are there important differences?**

The most striking similarities are that the female characters of the films revolved around the men in their lives, that there was common cheating both on the part of men and women, that much of the film's style relied on its fast speech, that it depicted African American servants sometimes respected and sometimes abused by their white bosses, and that much of it revolved around high society characters. As far as how they depicted women, *I'm No Angel* definitely showed Tira as a more independent woman that, though enhanced by her relationships, was not characterized by them as were most of the women in *The Women*. Also, because of Tira's rocky relationship with money, at least the former showed a comparison of different social classes, while the latter only focused on the higher class. Finally, the latter depicted the relationships between women, while the former most illustrated relationships between Tira and the men in her life whether her boss or lover.